Loretta Sanchez
1960–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE 1997–
DEMOCRAT FROM CALIFORNIA

Image courtesy of the Member

Loretta Sanchez won election to the U.S. House, her first political office, by defeating a longtime incumbent. During her tenure in the House, Representative Sanchez has established herself as an advocate for economic development, a strong military, homeland security, and education issues. In 2003, when Loretta's sister, Linda, won election to the House, the two became the first sisters to serve concurrently in Congress.

Loretta Sanchez was born in Lynwood, California, on January 7, 1960. She is the oldest daughter of Ignacio Sandoval Sánchez and Maria Socorro Macias.[1] She graduated in 1982 with a B.S. in economics from Chapman University, and in 1984 she earned an MBA from American University. Sanchez settled in Orange County, California. From 1984 to 1987, she worked as a special projects manager at the Orange County Transportation Authority. Sanchez then entered the private sector in the investment banking industry and later worked as a strategist at a leading consulting company. A registered Republican and a fiscal conservative, she broke with the GOP in 1992, believing the party had marginalized immigrants and women.

In 1996 Sanchez declared her candidacy in the race for a California district encompassing central Orange County. During the campaign, she touted her business credentials, particularly her effort to secure funding from national companies to establish programs between local grade schools and state colleges in Orange County.[2] Despite her lack of political experience, she defeated three male contenders in the Democratic primary with 35 percent of the vote. In the general election she faced longtime incumbent Republican Bob Dornan, a controversial and outspoken conservative. Her platform included support for small- and medium-sized businesses, investment in high tech research, and federal funding for school improvements. Sanchez also appealed to the district's traditionally conservative voters with a tough-on-crime agenda, advocating a ban on assault weapons and the elimination of gun show loopholes. Sanchez prevailed with a 984-vote margin out of more than 100,000 cast—eking out a 47 to 46 percent win.[3] For more than a year, Sanchez contended with Dornan's challenge to her election. In February 1998, the House voted overwhelmingly to dismiss Dornan's complaint.[4] Later that year, she faced Dornan again in the general election in one of the most expensive races in the country. Her clash with Dornan provided Sanchez with national exposure, making her one of the Democratic Party's primary congressional conduits for appealing to Latinos,

women, and young voters. Sanchez prevailed with a 56 to 39 percent margin of victory. She won her six subsequent re-election bids comfortably, garnering as much as 69 percent of the vote.[5]

When Sanchez took her seat in the House on January 7, 1997, she received assignments on the Education and Workforce Committee and the National Security Committee (later renamed Armed Services). She is currently the highest-ranking woman on the Armed Services Committee and the second-ranking Democrat on the Homeland Security Committee, which she joined in the 109th Congress (2005–2007) after she left her seat on the Education and Workforce Committee.

A former member of the United Food and Commercial Workers with family roots in the union movement, Representative Sanchez is a congressional friend of organized labor despite her strong ties to business. She voted against "fast track" trade authority that authorized the President to negotiate trade agreements without congressional approval, oversight, or amendment. Sanchez also broke with the William J. (Bill) Clinton administration when she voted against granting China permanent normal trade relations. Sanchez has a mixed position on trade agreements, basing her approval on whether such treaties constitute "fair trade." Sanchez also is a congressional leader on global human rights issues.[6]

In line with her fiscally conservative principles, Sanchez joined the Democratic Blue Dog Caucus, advocated a major overhaul of the IRS, and supported reductions in the federal budget deficit. Nevertheless, she believed the federal government should play a role in improving local life, particularly in the area of education. A graduate of the Head Start program, Sanchez vowed to make federally funded education programs available to low-income children. She also authored legislation to encourage tax-free bonds to spur funding for school construction. As a Representative, Sanchez has enjoyed success steering federal money and projects into her California district that have benefitted both the local and the state economy.

FOR FURTHER READING

Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, "Loretta Sanchez," http://bioguide.congress.gov.

NOTES

1   *Politics in America, 2002* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 2001): 152–153.

2   *New Members of Congress Almanac for the 105th Congress*: 32.

3   "Election Statistics, 1920 to Present," http://history.house.gov/institution/election-statistics/election-statistics.

4   "House Formally Dismisses Dornan Challenge to Sanchez," 13 February 1998, *Washington Post*: A6; Jodi Wilogren, "House Gives Sanchez Reason for Celebration: Task Force Drops Inquiry, Leaving Her with Incumbency, National Celebrity and Fund-Raising Prowess," 5 February 1998, *Los Angeles Times*: A1.

5   "Election Statistics, 1920 to Present," http://history.house.gov/institution/election-statistics/election-statistics.

6   *Politics in America, 2002*: 152–153.